

Disordered Affections
Luke 16:19-31 & 1 Timothy 6:6-19

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost/ 25th September 2022

Today's lectionary pairs the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and Paul's teaching on "the love of money" as the "root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Instead of focusing on the gospel or the epistle reading this morning, I would like to hold them in tension. They are, in their own way, challenging texts. Like last week, when we heard Jesus say, "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Lk. 16:13), we have yet another difficult parable found only in Luke, a parable about the dangers of wealth, but also something else. Paul is writing to the leadership of the church, but he's really writing to all of us; he calls us to put our love behind something other than money and wealth. Paul's summons can shed some light on how to approach the parable, for both texts turn our attention to the affections of the heart.

If we turn first to the epistle, we see that Paul is concerned about our inner lives and the object or focus of our desires. There is much to be gained by a life of "godliness" (*eusebia*) and "contentment" (*autarkeias*), and, therefore, we must be wary of personal desires that move us away from the love of God. Godliness is shorthand for the Christian life, a life that has to be nurtured and cultured, cultivated. And Paul is particularly concerned by the way the love of money, in particular, draws us away from the Christian life.

It's important to note that Paul doesn't say that money itself is "a root of all kinds of evil." Money and wealth can do a lot of good in the world. Money and wealth can help advance God's reign in the world, reverse many injustices, and help lift God's people out of poverty. Having lots of money, being well-off and wealthy, doesn't mean that one will automatically wander from the faith and pierce oneself with many pains, although the temptations to do so might be greater. Money itself is not the source of our problems. Paul insists, however, that it's the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil. It's the love of money and wealth—and the power and security that come with it, especially lots of it—that is so destructive.

As we all know, obsession with money and wealth, our love of money, and our love for the things we can buy and achieve with money can make our hearts cold and narrow. Money is good at building walls between those that have and those that don't. Money has a way of isolating us from those in need. We become obsessed with our needs first. We become greedy. Selfish. Our identities become falsely grounded in how much we own or the size of our portfolios or the size of our homes or the types of communities where we live. To lose money is to lose a part of oneself; to lose money is a kind of death, a mini death. And so we become miserly. Countless studies and polls have shown that the wealthiest in society are not the most generous.¹ We become fearful, fearful of losing what we have. And then we begin to hoard, saving it for a "rainy day" that never seems to come—even when we look outside and can see that's it's clearly raining. Then we become anxious. The more we have to keep, the more we have to lose. And it's the loss of wealth, of not having enough, that haunts many—even when some have more accumulated resources than they could ever use in a lifetime or many lifetimes. And if you were a child or grandchild of someone who lived through the Great Depression in the

1930s, if you grew up in a household where resources were always scarce, if you worried about how you were going to pay the mortgage or rent and put food on the table, then money and wealth generate a different kind of anxiety and fear—for good reasons. Still, compared with most people in the world, Western Christians—all citizens of the West—have, by and large, more than most people in the world. And still, we are anxious and far from content.

That was certainly true for the Rich Man in Jesus' parable. He was not content. Instead, he was anxious, selfish, and fearful. This parable, sometimes known as the Parable of Dives and Lazarus, was unusually popular in the Middle Ages. Although unnamed in the parable, the rich man was given the name Dives, related to the Latin "divus" or divine, meaning blessed by the gods. To be rich, it was assumed, one was blessed by the gods. If you do a Google search, you can see how popular this parable was in the Middle Ages and the number of cathedrals throughout Europe with sculptural reliefs and carvings depicting the story. As Europe increased in wealth during this period, anxiety was also on the rise, and many sermons raised the question, "Could a rich man enter the kingdom of heaven?" For example, this question was a deep concern for the citizens of Florence during the Renaissance, given its extreme wealth. Inequalities in the distribution of wealth in Florence were everywhere. A census of people and an inventory of property in 1427 shows that 1 percent of the population owned one-quarter of the city's wealth, with twenty percent paying minimal tax, and thirty percent no tax at all.² The inequality generated considerable anxiety and many sermons were preached on this question: how can the poor be ignored? How could they ignore the poor and still call themselves followers of Christ? It's worth remembering that Christianity transformed how one looked at the poor and destitute, not as beggars but as *persons* in search of justice and protection, leading Christian communities to engage in forms of social action that had wider effects than mere charity. It was this view toward the poor that helped to spark the growth of Christianity in the early centuries of the Church.³

Despite the anxiety about whether a rich man will go to heaven, this parable is not really about heaven and hell. The rich man is in Hades, not hell; only later were these two combined. Instead, we need to focus on how the rich man related to Lazarus—and it should not be overlooked that it's the poor man and not the rich man who has a name, a name that means "God helps" or "the one whom God helps." It's a way of Jesus saying that God sees him. God knows his name and will help.

The rich man - dressed in purple and fine linen sumptuously feasting daily - is a sad soul in this parable. Did you notice that not once does the rich man own up to his own mistreatment of Lazarus? Not once does the rich man repent. Not once does the rich man even talk *to* Lazarus. And yet—he knows Lazarus' name. It's implied in the text that the reason the rich man knows his name is because he walked past him countless times when he was alive; he knew Lazarus was poor, hungry, and covered in sores, sitting at the gates of the city.⁴

And even from his place of torment in Hades, looking at the comforting position of Lazarus, the rich man does not seem to comprehend the great reversal that has taken place. His idol, his love of wealth, has not saved or protected him. He still does not understand the difference between his idol and the God of Lazarus. "What he has given his heart to still warps his vision to the point that he cannot explicitly state what it is his brothers need to be warned

about. The acts and decisions of the rich man in the parable directly stemmed from who/what he loved and therefore worshipped.”⁵ This isn’t a story about karma; Jesus tells this story to reinforce the parable we looked at last week (Luke 16:1-13): we can only follow one god/God, and we can only give our hearts to one true devotion. We cannot attend to both God and wealth. What is being required of us, therefore, is something like *attentioned* discipleship.⁶ That is, we need to become conscious of what we value and devalue and why. And this brings us back to the heart (as I mentioned in last week’s [sermon](#)), to what we love.

The sermon title is an allusion to the work of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the Spanish Catholic priest, theologian, and founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Throughout his writings, he talks a lot about “disordered affections.” I referred to this last week as well. Ignatius developed a particular method of spirituality that involved the scrutiny of the heart, examining its motives and desires. In Ignatian spirituality, it’s known as the examen, particularly the examen that one does at the end of the day as you review the choices and events of the day.

Ignatius brought special attention to the heart, what we put our heart behind, what we desire, what we want and don’t want, to know what we want and why we want it or why we don’t want what we want. His spirituality, more than just ego-centric navel-gazing, entails becoming more conscious, becoming clear(er) about our drives and motivations so that we don’t just get caught up in what we think we want. The goal is a kind of inner freedom from affections and desires that pull the heart away from what it really wants, from what gives life. He wrote out his method in a well-known classic, *Spiritual Exercises*. The full title is: “Spiritual exercises to overcome oneself and to order one’s life without reaching a decision through some disordered affection.” Another translation for “disordered affection” is “inordinate attachment.” Ignatius used this term to describe the deep-seated desires for other things that pull us away from God. When our desire for God is overpowered by our desire for other things, our affections, he claims, are out of order. Ignatius sees freedom from disordered affections as essential to following Jesus. His *Spiritual Exercises* are designed to help us gain that freedom.

It seems to me that this resonates with what we have in 1 Timothy and Luke. So much pain and suffering are caused in our lives when our affections are disordered, when we love money and wealth and the making of money and striving after wealth more than our love for God and loving the things and people that God loves. When our hearts are in the right place, everything changes. Ever the cardiologist, Jesus said, “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:24). To be his follower is to be concerned about the health of our hearts. Augustine (354-430), writing in the 4th century said something similar, he believed that the essence of sin is what he called “disordered love.” This is true for so much in our lives, whether it’s the love of money or the love of any thing or idea or ideology or person. Augustine wrote, “To have a well-ordered heart is to love: the right thing, in the right degree, in the right way, and with the right kind of love.” As Jesus himself showed us through his heart. He showed us how to live, showed us the way to love. And when we are close to him and when he is close to us, with our hearts reordered and alive in this love, we can offer our hearts to the Lord and one another, and put our hearts into kingdom-work, all for the sake of him who in love gave his life for us.



Saint-Lazare Cathedral, Autun, France

¹ For example, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-helpful-brain/202206/are-poorer-people-more-generous>; https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-pandemic-is-testing-the-generosity-of-americas-billionaires-a-washington-post-survey-of-the-50-richest-americans-looks-at-who-has-given-and-who-hasnt/2020/06/01/28149f42-96d2-11ea-9f5e-56d8239bf9ad_story.html

² Cited in Peter Howard, “The Language of Dives and Lazarus: Preaching Generosity and Almsgiving in Renaissance Florence,” *I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 23, number 1 (2020): 35.

³ See Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 80.

⁴ Chelsea Harman, Sermon Commentary for Luke 16:19-31, Calvin Center for Excellence in Preaching, <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2022-09-25/luke-1619-31/>

⁵ Harman.

⁶ Harman.